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Nicaraguan rebel seeking funds in N.J.

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UNION CITY — Doubtful of renewed United States economic support, Nicaraguan rebel leader Eden Pastora Gomez has come to New Jersey to tap Cuban exiles for funds to feed and arm his soldiers.

"We are practically without ammunition, without uniforms and other equipment," Pastora said yesterday at a press conference in a downtown commercial building in this predominantly Hispanic city. "The situation is becoming more serious every moment."

Cleashaven, wearing a black leather jacket, and surrounded by security guards, Pastora met reporters in a sparsely furnished second-floor office of Abdala, one of several anti-Castro Cuban organizations based in Union City.

Roger Hernandez, a member of the Solidarity Committee for a Democratic Central America, which helped organize Pastora's visit to Union City, said the group has raised \$10,000 in the past three days for the rebel troops.

The 15-member committee was formed by Cuban and Nicaraguan exiles two years ago "to support groups fighting for democracy in Central America," said spokesman Jose Alvarez.

Pastora said that since the U.S. Congress cut off aid last year, his guerrilla organization, a faction of the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE), has relied on private donations from Cuban communities and private individuals in the United States.

"Individuals have helped. That's the reason we've been able to subsist this year," he said.

The Reagan administration is hoping to persuade Congress to approve \$14.8 million in covert CIA funds to the contras — rebels seeking to overthrow Nicaragua's Sandinista government.

Pastora said he is lobbying senators and congressmen during this trip to try to drum up support, but he said he did not expect to meet with any representatives of the Reagan administration.

He said he would prefer overt, direct aid, to covert support but that he would accept funds either way, as long as there were no conditions attached.

Given the mood in Congress, where the majority opposes resuming any aid to the contras, the likelihood of unconditional funds seems extremely remote.

Pastora, a former Sandinista leader and now commander of one of the largest of the half dozen rebel groups, had received support from the Central Intelligence Agency until last year.

Pastora's group and the other rebels received \$80 million over the course of 2½ years, until Congress cut off funding in 1984, largely because of the CIA-directed mining of Nicaragua's harbors.

The CIA had dropped its support for Pastora's forces about the same time when he continued to resist pressure to join forces with a right-wing, anti-Sandinista group.

Pastora has said repeatedly that he will not merge with this group — the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) — which is bigger and better-financed, because too many of its members are followers of Nicaragua's former dictator, Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

The purpose of his trip, which has taken him through Miami, Boston, and Trenton, is to raise funds and to counter reports that his troops are deserting for want of food and other basic supplies, he said.

Pastora says he has 7,000 troops under his command, but American officials say he has fewer. He said yesterday that not one of his soldiers has deserted because of hunger, and he denied that any had sold their weapons.

Reports to that effect are an effort

by the Sandinistas to discredit him, he said.

A lack of supplies to support troops, however, forced ARDE recently to turn 250 soldiers in to the International Red Cross after they deserted from the Sandinista forces, Pastora said.

Pastora said his trip has raised \$78,000 so far. Most of that — \$50,000 — was collected in Miami, he said. These fund-raising efforts, however, fall far short of what is needed to sustain the military effort, he said.

"When we're talking about \$10,000, \$20,000, or \$200,000," he said, "We're talking sandwiches."

In response to a report that the United States is considering channeling funds to the rebels indirectly through Asian countries, Pastora dismissed the possibility and said, "I ignore that."